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Keep on top of technological change

E-BIZ

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Entrepreneurs intent on using technology to full advantage should always keep on top of the technology curve, and understand how rapidly evolving technologies can benefit their business.

One clear trend is a continual plummeting in the cost of certain products and services. Consider Internet connectivity: A few years ago, buying any type of high-speed connection to the Internet would have cost several thousands of dollars. Today, $40 a month will get you a high-speed cable modem or ADSL (asynchronous digital subscriber line) connection.

Three years ago, a one-gigabyte hard drive would have cost $400, yet today that same investment will buy a drive with 20 times the storage space. Backup devices are also cheaper.

Clearly, technology is moving forward at a rate that astounds even many in the computer industry. Yet often technological change occurs in such a way that it can be difficult to see the unique opportunities that are emerging.

Consider video, a technological world that has become a favourite of mine to explore. If you are listening carefully, you'll notice that suddenly quite a few companies are talking about "digital video." You might dismiss the phrase as a marketing gambit, and lose sight of the fact that what is really going on is a subtle yet important technological shift that provides opportunity to small businesses.

Consider the line of new Sony digital camcorders. These are targeted at the consumer market, and advertisements tout the fact that the technology offers unprecedented recording clarity, compatibility with traditional camcorders and other features. Yet the ads fail to mention that this technology makes video production for small business more practical than ever.

The technological shift to digital video is important, but not new. For quite some time, professional video producers in television and film have been migrating to digital video. In essence, they record to tape in a format that consists of the digital ones and zeros of the computer era. Then, using a technology known as FireWire, they transfer this data directly into their computer for further editing.

The significance of FireWire, developed by Apple Computer, is that there is virtually no loss of quality when video and audio are transferred from camera to computer.

The improvements in audio and video quality, combined with computer-based editing capabilities, have revolutionized newsrooms around the world, and have transformed all other aspects of professional video production.

Enter the new line of Sony Digital Handycams. Although not quite of the same calibre as the professional cameras used by news organizations, they offer an extremely high-quality image compared with their analog cousins.

And since they too support FireWire, consumers are now presented with a technology that brings them closer to the sophistication of the television newsroom.

This shift to digital video in the consumer market is significant in that it provides a level of quality in a camcorder that was previously restricted to more sophisticated video cameras costing many thousands of dollars more.

Now more than ever small businesses might find that video is more practical as a marketing, training and support tool.

Combine these digital video cameras with the inexpensive digital video editing technology now available, and the fact is that small businesses can do some amazing things with video that would have been far out of their reach even a year ago.

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